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Increase in Atlas, Polaris Funds May Be Asked by Administration

By Katherine Johnsen

Washington—U. S. Defense Secretary Thomas S. Gates, Jr., indicated last week that the Administration may soon ask Congress for funds to increase Fiscal 1961 procurement of the Air Force-Convair Atlas ICBM and the Navy-Lockheed Polaris fleet ballistic missile.

Testifying before a joint session of the Senate's Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee and Space Committee, Gates said the Defense Department is "contemplating" augmentations of the two programs. He said USAF and Navy have submitted to him proposals outlining various methods of accelerating the programs. Gates' testimony confirmed earlier reports that the Administration is thinking of increasing its request for Fiscal 1961 defense spending (AW Mar. 14, p. 25).

The Administration's Fiscal 1961 budget now under consideration by the House and Senate Appropriations Committees provides for 13 squadrons of 10 Atlas missiles each and for three Polaris-equipped nuclear submarines.

Last year, Congress voted funds to purchase 17 Atlas squadrons, but Defense Department is buying only 13 Atlas squadrons. Navy asked for nine Polaris submarines in the Fiscal 1961 program and got three.

Gates said he was considering placing more Atlases at sites already authorized. Any additional Atlases ordered probably would be the long range version (see p. 34).

Gates observed that, in connection with the Atlas and Polaris programs, Defense Department also is reviewing related programs such as Titan and solid-propellant Minuteman ICBM projects.

Air Force has reported that Atlases ordered now or in the near future could start closing the missile gap at the end of 1962, as against early 1963 when Minuteman ICBMs may start coming into the inventory in numbers.

Gates also testified that a decision will be made within six months as to whether to move into production of the top-priority Midas missile warning satellite and development of the support aspects of the system.

Senate committee questioning was primarily aimed at clarifying Gates' controversial interpretation of intelligence estimates to support his conclusion that the anticipated missile gap will be substantially less than the three-to-one ratio estimated previously by former

In January, Gates told the House Appropriations Committee: "Secretary McElroy was operating on the basis of capability figures that produced, on a theoretical capability basis, something that was like three to one. This new intelligence estimate has narrowed the differences."

In last week's testimony, Gates doubled that McElroy had ever made the three-to-one superiority estimate. He said that a "research group" appointed in the Department of Defense had been unable to ascertain that McElroy had made the estimate.

Sen. E. L. Bartlett (D-Alaska) suggested that instead of establishing a committee to determine "whether McElroy said what he is said to have said," Defense Department should have "picked up the telephone and asked Mr. McElroy."

Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.) told Gates that the closed-door testimony of Allen W. Dulles, director of Central Intelligence Agency, is a "direct contradiction" to the testimony of Gates, and that the missile gap will be greater

Gates declined to give his numerical estimate of Russian missile superiority, commenting that it is "terribly misleading to get into ratios and specific numbers" because they do not take into account factors such as accuracy, reliability, defense posture, hardening of bases. "I don't know how to announce a ratio without causing more confusion," he said.

Committee Counsel Edwin L. Weisl pointed out that the Defense Department has consistently underestimated its own missile requirements by wide margins and suggested that "you could be just as wrong in underestimating the Russian capability." The budget amounts requested by Defense for missiles, as compared with the amounts which were ultimately programmed, for the past five fiscal years were given by Weisl as: \$159 million requested in the 1956 budget, and \$526 million ultimately programmed; \$859 million requested in the 1957 budget, and \$1.4 billion programmed; \$1.9 billion requested in the 1958 budget, and \$2.1 billion programmed; \$2.4 billion requested in the 1959 budget, and \$2.9 billion programmed; \$2.5 billion requested in the 1960 budget, and \$3.3 billion programmed.